

UNTAPPED

TRANSFORMING TEACHER LEADERSHIP TO HELP STUDENTS SUCCEED

For more information, read the full report: *Untapped: Transforming Teacher Leadership to Help Students Succeed*

What Policymakers Can Do to Transform Teacher Leadership

Across the education field, there is unusual consensus that strong teacher leaders are key to improving our nation's schools. Unfortunately, clear expectations for what teacher leaders should do, and strategies to prepare them to do it, are few and far between. A recent survey found that while 86 percent of urban school districts have teacher leader roles, only 32 percent offered specialized training for teachers stepping into those roles.¹

Assigning teachers to leadership roles without quality training does a double disservice: It takes teaching time away from the educators best prepared to accelerate student learning, and then fails to equip them with the skills they need to lead colleagues to similar success.

The neglected state of teacher leaders is regrettable because we know that with the right support, they can immediately boost academic performance in their schools. Data from the first two years of New Leaders' Emerging Leaders Program (ELP)—a program that provides job-embedded training and coaching to teacher leaders—indicate that even while still in training, almost three quarters of participants were able to increase student learning across the classrooms they supervised.

Developing strong and effective teacher leaders who can guide their colleagues to success should be central to any school improvement strategy, but it requires far more planning and support than it currently receives.

Here are six ways policymakers can help to unleash the untapped potential of teacher leadership:

- 1. Remove barriers that prevent teachers and other staff from taking on leadership responsibilities.**
 - For example, amend rules that exclude teachers and other staff with hybridized responsibilities from formally observing teachers, so they are able to provide instructional support and, where appropriate, evaluate colleagues' performance.
- 2. Adopt policies that empower principals to identify and support teacher leaders.**
 - For example, adopt rules that give principals a measure of control over school-level hiring, budgeting and scheduling decisions so they can recruit and promote teachers ready to lead and formally encourage collaboration among staff.
- 3. Direct funds to support high-quality teacher leadership training.**
 - For example, support funding for job-embedded teacher leadership development, or encourage better use of existing funds by providing technical assistance to identify proven approaches to leadership training.
- 4. Build systems to help principals manage teacher leadership in a way that reflects the full scope of their influence.**
 - For example, support states and districts that have coherent plans for evaluation and clear goals for teacher leaders that are tied to student achievement in their own classrooms and those they supervise.
- 5. Create incentives for districts and CMOs to create shared leadership structures.**
 - For example, incentivize explicit, school-level goals for sharing leadership responsibilities and offering appropriate training and support.
- 6. Incorporate practitioner feedback when developing policy proposals around teacher leadership.**
 - For example, convene teacher working groups around key questions, such as what effective teacher leaders should know and be able to achieve, and give these perspectives fair weight in the policy conversation.

¹ Council of Great City Schools. (2015, April.) Assistant principals and teacher leaders in America's Great City Schools. Presented at the Wallace Foundation Principal Pipeline Initiative Convening, New York, NY.